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WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16, 2008

In Today's Papers

Rice Addresses ATC Meetings in Washington
Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Taraf, Cumhuriyet, Zaman, and
Yeni Safak report Secretary Rice addressed the American-Turkish
Council's (ATC) 27th annual conference in Washington on Tuesday.
Secretary Rice said Washington is closely following the AKP closure

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case. Mainstream Hurriyet notes in, "A Secularist Blow from Rice,"
that, "Rice emphasized that Turkey must solve the AKP closure case
within a secularist context and secularist principles." Meanwhile,
Islamist-oriented Zaman writes, "We are watching the closure case
closely, but an ear must be given to the voices of the voters." NTV
notes Rice characterized the closure case as "an issue for the Turks
to solve." Conservative-nationalist Ortadogu notes Rice emphasized,
"The U.S. and Turkey share important democratic values," but that,
"The Turks must make the decision concerning the closure case."
Mainstream Milliyet calls Rice's emphasis on secularism, "striking,"
but points out, "the U.S. is determined to remain impartial and did
not extend its support to the AKP."

On Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, Rice said the U.S.
"encouraged" changes to the article, and congratulated Prime
Minister Erdogan for his efforts to change the law. Rice stressed
it was important that "Turkey transforms its democracy and joins the
EU." She also urged Turkey to improve non-Muslim minority rights
and grant freedoms to the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul.
Regarding the PKK, Rice said the aim was to eliminate the PKK in
northern Iraq and cut the organization's financial resources in
cooperation with European partners.

Bryza, Lagendijk at ATC Meetings
Hurriyet, Sabah, Vatan, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report
U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian
affairs Matt Bryza told the American-Turkish Council (ATC) meetings
in Washington the continuation of Turkey's EU process falls within
the strategic interests of the U.S. "Some reform opportunities

might have been missed, but in the end, it is the Turkish people who decide on the types of reforms to be realized," Bryza said. Islamist-leaning English language Today's Zaman says, "Bryza recommended that Turkey should take steps 'for strengthening cultural rights' for Kurdish people after the finalization of military steps against the PKK."

Mainstream Hurriyet quotes on page one Joost Lagendijk, co-chairman of Turkey-EU joint parliamentary commission, as saying "The AKP must show that it wants to carry Turkey to the EU, not to Iran." Lagendijk stressed the EU was "disappointed" that EU adjustment reforms slowed down in Turkey following the adoption of a number of reforms in 2003-2004. "Turkey should carry out reforms to improve the living standards of Turkish people, not merely to please the EU," he emphasized. Lagendijk criticized the AKP for failing to take forward steps concerning the Kurdish question. He also said, "The AKP misjudged its timing and approach to the headscarf debate. The AKP's headscarf reforms should have been passed as part of a broader reform package." Nevertheless, Lagendijk also warned "the closure of the AKP could lead to a suspension of Turkey's EU membership talks."

AKP Alone in Changing Article 301

All papers continue coverage of the ruling AKP government's proposed changes to Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, which outlaws "insulting Turkishness." Speaking to reporters on his return from Qatar, Prime Minister Erdogan said the parliamentary committee was still working on the changes. Erdogan dismissed approaches such as "the changes are imposed by the EU" and said the amendments were brought onto agenda on a "serious demand from the country." Opposition far right MHP chairman Devlet Bahceli told his party group yesterday that by changing Article 301, PM Erdogan actually intended to "fund his political future" by securing the support of the EU. "Our party will not take part in such an assassination

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attempt against the Turkish nation," stressed Bahceli. Under the headline, "The AKP is Left Alone in Changing 301," liberal Radikal reports the pro-Kurdish DTP group Chief Ahmet Turk said his party will not back the AKP proposal for amending the article. Turk said "Article 301 killed Armenian journalist Hrant Dink," and called for the "total abolishment" of the article.

Editorial Commentary on Amendment of Penal Code Article 301

"The Limit of the AKP's Love for Democracy"

Mehmet Y. Yilmaz wrote in mainstream Hurriyet (4/16): "In January 2008 newspaper archives, one can easily find statements from Prime Minister Erdogan and Justice Minister Sahin which promised changes to Article 301. That was in January, and now we are in April and the debates concerning Article 301 continue. While the prime minister insists on the presidency as the decision-making authority in 301 cases, some in the AKP suggest one of three choices, i.e. the justice minister, the president or an independent board. This rift within the party is a demonstration of the AKP's effort to keep up appearances. After three months, the ruling party is still indecisive on how to change one law. The AKP does not care about democracy or freedom of thought. The AKP follows its hidden agenda and pretends to play a democracy game when it is necessary to protect their power. EU officials are either pretending to take this bait or else, they truly have taken the bait."

"The 301 War"

Mustafa Unal wrote in Islamist leaning Zaman (4/16): "The controversial Article 301 is now in parliament and is expected to come to the floor next week. The impact of foreign suggestions to revise 301 is undeniable and inevitable. Turkey could have changed the law itself before other countries had a chance to chime in with their criticisms; but unfortunately that did not happen. 301 should be changed because it keeps Turkey behind global standards regarding democracy and freedom of thought. The wording of 301 should be clear and precise. Currently the debate continues to determine who has the authority to approve a court case based on 301. Some in the AKP think that providing the president with that kind of authority would be wrong. The opposition, on the other hand, seems like a bloc completely united against 301. We have to keep in mind that

the state needs protection but individuals need protection as well. Politics is obliged to respect state and individual law at the same time."

Barzani Wants Kurds to 'Stay Away from Violence'

Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak writes Zagros TV reported the Kurdish Regional Administration (KRA) leader Massoud Barzani met with a delegation of the Sirnak Bar Association in Selahaddin in northern Iraq. Barzani said, "Kurds must change the way they think; using violence is a thing of the past." He added, "We need to make fundamental changes. We have introduced democracy for Iraq and federalism for Kurdistan; now we need to take our nationalism to a different phase." Barzani went on saying, "Now is the time for dialogue. Kurds should not get involved in violence either at home or in neighboring countries."

DTP Mayors Fined for Supporting Roj TV

All papers report 53 pro-Kurdish DTP mayors were sentenced to 2 1/2 months in prison for supporting the pro-PKK Roj TV. The sentences were commuted to fines of 1,875 YTL each. The mayors were convicted of supporting crime and criminals because they asked Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen in a letter not to take the Copenhagen-based Roj TV off the air in Denmark.

TV News:

NTV

Domestic News

- Five suspects have been arrested in connection with the recent

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student clashes at the Akdeniz (Mediterranean) University in Antalya.

- Van police investigate two pro-Kurdish DTP MPs who joined the Nevruz celebrations in the eastern city of Van. Following the celebration, two people died during clashes between police and demonstrators on March 22.

- Higher Education Board (YOK) President Professor Yusuf Ziya Ozcan met with 32 university rectors to discuss the unrest at universities.

International News

- On April 22, officials from the countries who border Iraq will discuss Iraq's security at a meeting in Kuwait.

- The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has adopted a resolution urging European governments to undertake steps for distinguishing between Muslims and fundamentalist groups.

- Conservative leader Silvio Berlusconi has won a decisive victory in Italy's parliamentary elections, and will soon undertake his third stint as Premier.

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